**A Bit of Shock and Awe: A La Kyiv**

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The sinking of the Russian Black Sea flagship, the forty-six-year-old Moskva, was a stunning example of shock and awe a la Kyiv. Tactically and operationally, this was a military coup applying large measures of deception and skill in placing what appeared to have been two Neptune anti-ship cruise missiles on target. And the Soviet-designed Slava class cruiser, with eight explosive-laden cruise missiles stored on the main deck, was indeed a potential ticking time bomb if hit-a vulnerability US Navy planners sought to exploit in an attack if the Cold War turned hot.

Strategically and geopolitically, it is unclear what the ramifications will be. Obviously, this was another disaster for a disaster-filled Special Military Operation. While the scuttling of the German pocket battleship Graf Spee in December 1939 off Montevideo, Uruguay in the Battle of the Platte and the sinking of the battleship Bismarck in May 1941 in the North Atlantic by the Royal Navy were morale boosters for Britain, neither changed the outcome of the war.

Perhaps, the sinking of the former US Navy light cruiser Phoenix sold to Argentina and renamed Belgrano in May 1982 by the nuclear submarine HMS Conqueror, in the first stages of the Falklands Campaign was a harbinger of how a seemingly outnumbered British naval task force would defeat a larger, entrenched opponent. However, the most relevant example is the famous Doolittle Raid over Tokyo eighty years and two days ago.

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The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor sank America’s battleship fleet on December 7, allowing the Japanese military to sweep across and occupy huge swathes of Asian territory. After a compressed training period, 16 B-25 bombers with Army Air Force and Navy pilots were embarked aboard the aircraft carrier USS Hornet to strike Tokyo in a daring, one way raid eighty years ago this month. The physical damage was minor. The psychological damage was immense, shattering the myth of the invulnerability of Japan’s home islands.

Supposing both Ukraine and Russia were to rely more on “shock and awe” tactics to compel the other side to seek negotiations to end the conflict, what might they be? Obviously, Ukraine understands the Black Sea Fleet is vulnerable. Sinking even more Russian warships would not only prevent the prospect of amphibious assaults. Russian morale would be further shaken.

The Kerch Bridge links the eastern and western shores of the Azov Sea effectively blocking access. That allows Russia to control the passage of all transiting ships. Destroying parts or all of the bridge will prevent direct road access to Crimea substantially increasing transit time to circumnavigate the Sea of Azov. And, the psychological effects will be significant.

Retaliating with missile strikes against Kyiv as punishment suggests that Russia has limited options. And, frankly, while inflicting pain may soothe Moscow’s embarrassment over losing Moskva, that does not compensate for this naval disaster. So, if Vladimir Putin were to consider shock and awe, what might he conclude?

In a lecture at Georgia Tech’s Nunn Center last week, when asked by Senator Sam Nunn, CIA Director Bill Burns answered that Russian use of chemical and nuclear weapons should not be dismissed. Burns previously served as the US Ambassador to the Russian Federation and met with Putin late last year in an attempt to forestall the invasion. Is this otherwise “unthinkable” event that was avoided during the Cold War now thinkable?

Pundits have noted that May 9 is the Russian holiday marking victory in the Great Patriotic War, which we call World War II. Sensationalizing that date, will the Russian military engineer some form of success to contribute to the celebration? And further suppose that between now and then, a senior American official might be sent to Kyiv following the visit of a succession of prime ministers and presidents of NATO members?

Having failed to capture Kyiv, would Putin launch a nuclear strike to destroy it and along with it kill President Volodymyr Zelensky and any senior visitors? Would the shock and awe of a devastating nuclear attack paralyze a Western response or provoke one? If the latter, what might that be?

One appropriate response would be to confine retaliation to within Ukraine’s borders, destroying not only the logistics but as much of the Russian military as possible reversing the course of the war. And the US and NATO have the wherewithal to accomplish that mission.

What occurs next is unknowable. But, tragically, this scenario may not be limited to fiction, war games and action movies.

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